

VZCZCXRO8438
PP RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHBK #5975/01 3330411
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 290411Z NOV 07
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0876
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 3984
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 8027
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0121
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 2022
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 5237
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 005975

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MLS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/29/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: UPSTART PARTY WINNING THAI ELECTION TV COVERAGE WAR

REF: A. BANGKOK 5914 (DISQUALIFICATIONS)

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 5881 (OATHS AND INSULTS)

[1](#)C. BANGKOK 5749 (ELECTION PLAYBILL)

[1](#)D. BANGKOK 4905 (EX-TRT FIGURES FORM PARTY)

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission James F. Entwistle, reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: A poll agency's November 9 - 20 analysis of television news coverage ahead of Thailand's December 23 election indicates that the upstart Motherland (Puea Paendin) party and its candidates received a disproportionately large share of news coverage compared to other, ostensibly more popular, political parties. The pro-Thaksin PPP came in second in the tally of total air time. The survey only represents a brief snapshot of the nearly two-month election campaign. Nevertheless, the findings seem to indicate that the news media are thus far covering this election in a manner that does not exclude or clearly tilt the playing field against any major participant. End summary.

[1](#)2. (U) An analysis of election news coverage conducted by a prominent Thai poll agency ahead of Thailand's December 23 election indicates that the newly founded For the Motherland (Puea Paendin) party (reftel D) received a disproportionately large share of television news coverage compared to other political parties. The pro-Thaksin PPP came in second, and the Democrats third, by most measures. The ABAC-sponsored study examined election news coverage of Thailand's six public television stations during prime time hours (17:00 - 22:00) between November 9 and November 20.

[1](#)3. (SBU) We obtained an executive summary of the ABAC study which found:

-- Motherland received almost 50% more on-air news coverage on a per minute basis than the current opinion poll-leading People's Power Party (PPP). News stations devoted 203 minutes of coverage to the Motherland party, while the PPP received 132 minutes. The Democrat Party, widely considered PPP's chief competitor, received 107 minutes of coverage. Lesser-known parties received dramatically less coverage. (There are almost 40 parties competing; only perhaps half a dozen are expected to win seats.)

-- Television media also devoted more time to interview

Motherland candidates. The media devoted 106 minutes for Motherland's candidates compared to 42 and 25 minutes for Democrat Party and PPP candidates respectively. (Note: this analysis covers the period immediately following famously aggressive PPP leader Samak's angry outburst at a journalist (ref B) which evoked a very negative response from the press, and resulted in other PPP members urging Samak to show restraint. This may have contributed to the lower numbers for PPP candidate interviews, as the party leaders are the figures most often interviewed. End note.)

-- Although PPP received fewer minutes of coverage, the party was the subject of a higher number of distinct news stories than other parties. The media devoted 21% of news stories to cover the PPP, compared to Motherland's 18%. The Democrat Party was the subject of 17% of news stories.

14. (SBU) The Director of ABAC told us on November 26 that, even with the disproportionate coverage of Motherland, his study indicates a more balanced campaign reporting environment than the most recent 2006 and 2005 election campaign. For example, in the 2005 campaign, Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai party was the subject of three times as many news reports as nearest rival Democrats, according to the Director. (Note: we cannot confirm this figure. End note.)

15. (C) Comment: It remains to be seen to what extent election news coverage will ultimately correlate with voter preferences as expressed at the ballot box. So far, despite fears that the media would be pressured not to cover PPP, it appears to be getting more broadcast media coverage than almost all its rivals.

16. (C) Comment, continued. As noted (ref C), the

BANGKOK 00005975 002 OF 002

just-launched Motherland Party has been showing momentum, despite its low poll numbers; it may have benefited in the media partly from its novelty as the new face in the race. In addition, Motherland leader Suwit Khunkhitti seems more at ease with the press than most of his rivals, and he is campaigning hard. Chart Thai leader and former PM Banharn recently told the press that he expects Motherland to outpoll Chart Thai, and our travels in the northeast indicate that Motherland is putting up a good fight there against the dominant PPP. Although this election is often cast as a contest between PPP and the Democrats, Motherland appears to be a contender worth watching.

BOYCE